

United States Senator Tim Johnson

Opening Statement

Full Committee Hearing on the Condition of our Nation's Infrastructure and Proposals
for Needed Improvements

March 11, 2008

Mr. Chairman, today the Committee examines the state of the nation's infrastructure and possible ways of improving it. This is an important topic. I have worked hard throughout my career to improve infrastructure in South Dakota, including our state's highways and transit systems, water systems and stock of affordable housing. Infrastructure investments are needed across the state – in Indian Country, in our rural areas, and in our cities -- and those investments are in the national interest.

Mr. Chairman, you have introduced a bill addressing infrastructure concerns in housing, water, and transportation. That legislation helps give focus to the issues we are examining today. I look forward to reviewing the witnesses' testimony and learning more about the issues and possible responses to the problems.

As the legislative process advances, I want my colleagues to know that one issue that will be of concern to me is ensuring that we take rural as well as urban concerns into account in examining investment needs and developing any response. For example, in my state we have important needs but relatively few projects that would involve a minimum \$75 million Federal commitment, a minimum threshold that has been suggested. Also of concern are project criteria that emphasize leveraging. In Indian Country and in other poor rural areas, as well as generally in low population density states, the ability to provide meaningful financial leverage and to attract outside investors may be quite limited. Small numbers of people not doing especially well economically are not as well equipped to contribute to projects as large numbers of workers in large metro areas. But the citizens in these less populated states still have important needs that should be of concern to this committee, in housing, in water systems, in transportation.

So, as we examine the issues of infrastructure needs and possible responses, I will be concerned that any solutions that we develop would provide help in a state like South Dakota as well as in more populous areas of the country.

Mr. Chairman, thanks for your efforts on this issue. I look forward to working with you.